

SHIELD WEEKLY

TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION

WHO WAS THE MODEL?

or Missing: A Beautiful Heiress

BY ALDEN F. BRADSHAW



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Who Was the Model? OR, MISSING: A BEAUTIFUL HEIRESS.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

CHIEF WATTS' VISITORS.

"Is Chief Watts in his office?"

"Yes, sir."

"Engaged?"

"I believe he is, sir, just at this moment."

The scene was the general office of the inspectors of police, in the Headquarters building in Pemberton Square in the city of Boston. It was on a morning in December, one of those pleasant winter mornings when mankind in general is glad to be alive.

The terse inquiries above came from an imposing man in the uniform of a superior officer of the municipal police, the superintendent himself. He had just come down the narrow stairway which joins the inspectors' quarters with the extensive main offices of the Police Department, and his grave countenance and serious manner indicated a matter of unusual importance.

"Let me know at once when he is disengaged," he said, shortly, to the clerk who had responded to his questions, and, turning sharply about, he returned by the way he had come.

The clerk ventured sending in word to the chief, and the delay which less interest might have occasioned was thereby obviated. It was not more than ten minutes later when the superintendent again appeared, and immediately strode through the corridor leading to the private office of Chief Inspector Watts.

On this occasion, however, he was accompanied by two men. One was young, less than thirty, and rather pale and effeminate looking, with a plain, unattractive face, the main features of which indicated weakness of character and a mind easily influenced, whether to good or to evil. He was clad in a neat business suit, evidently nearly new,

and a top coat, and his general appearance, whatever his face may have suggested to one versed in physiognomy, was that of a young man of education and refinement, if not of considerable means.

The other was an elderly gentleman of seventy years, with gray hair and a refined and aristocratic countenance. He wore, over a dark broadcloth suit, a black overcoat with a cape, and his appearance was that of a clergyman, which, in fact, he was.

His step was tremulous as he followed the superintendent of police through the dim corridor, and was in vivid contrast with that of the latter, while his manner was one of subdued distress, as if no ordinary mission had brought him there that soft May morning.

The superintendent immediately ushered his two companions into the room, closing the door behind them. The chief, with an eye quick to read external appearances, instantly surmised something serious, and he rose to his feet to meet them.

"Good morning, Superintendent Eldredge," he said, gravely, with a mere glance at the others.

"Good morning, chief," was the reply, with a nod. "This is Rev. Dr. Lawton, the late rector of St. Vincent's."

"Glad to meet you, Dr. Lawton. I know you well by name."

"And this is Mr. Wade, a friend, who is engaged to marry the doctor's niece. Take a chair, Dr. Lawton. The doctor is in great distress, Chief Watts, and I think the situation may be one requiring your investigation. The doctor's niece, a girl of twenty, is mysteriously missing."

"Since when?" inquired Chief Watts, waving Wade to a chair. "I am very sorry to hear it."

"Since day before yesterday," explained the superintendent. Not a long time, I admit, yet some of the circumstances, as the doctor has stated them to me, indicate that all is not right. I rather think the girl may possibly have been abducted."

"I am sure of it, Chief Watts—sure of it," interposed Dr. Lawton, with distressful fervor. "Either abducted or worse! Tillie never was absent before in any such way as

this, and I am absolutely certain that some serious misfortune has befallen her."

"Let me know all of the particulars, Dr. Lawton," Chief Watts now said, resuming his seat. "If they indicate a case of abduction, I will have one of my inspectors investigate the matter at once. As you go out, superintendent," he added, as the latter turned toward the door, "will you ask the clerk to send Detective Keene in here?"

"Certainly."

"We will wait until Inspector Keene comes in. If it becomes necessary, I will detail him to look into the case, in event of which I now wish him to hear your story."

"But every moment of delay, sir——"

"Pardon me, doctor," interposed the chief, gravely, checking the old gentleman's protest, which was born of an anxiety which he could not suppress. "Haste in detective work is never advisable. If your niece has been abducted, or if any more serious fate has befallen her, the truth can be discovered only by careful and systematic work. Don't think me disinterested, for I will do all in my power to help you, but I must do it in my own way."

"Oh, I already feel sure of your interest, Chief Watts," returned the clergyman, striving to govern his nervousness. "But my anxiety at times is greater than I can bear."

"Let me give you one word of encouragement," said Chief Watts, kindly. "Scarce a day passes, sir, that in one locality or another, some person is not reported lost, dead or abducted. Of the entire number, only a very small percentage are the victims of crime, or of any serious misfortune."

"But that small percentage!" exclaimed Dr. Lawton, with his pale features a picture of apprehension and dismay. "Think of the murders committed, the terrible crimes that are perpetrated, the frightful outrages with which the daily papers are constantly filled. Under the circumstances, I cannot but fear the very worst."

"I now will consider those circumstances, doctor," Chief Watts bowed; "for here is Inspector Keene."

The clergyman looked up at the young man who entered, and both he and young Mr. Wade bowed in acknowledgment of

Chief Watts' introduction; but neither appeared in a state of mind to calmly suffer delay.

"Sit down, Detective Keene," said Chief Watts, with a glance at a chair. "I may detail you on a case of possible abduction, and I wish you to hear Dr. Lawton's statements. Now, doctor, what about this girl?"

The chief's change of manner rather surprised the clergyman, it was so business-like. He looked up quickly, and caught the glint of the chief's blue eyes, and instantly became aware that he had under estimated the energy and power of his questioner. But the change was to his liking.

"She is my niece, and her name is Matilda Mason," he hastened to reply. "We call her Tillie, for short."

"A daughter of your wife's brother?"

"Yes, sir; and an only child. She is an orphan, moreover, and has lived with me since she was ten years of age, and is like a daughter to me."

"Then you are well informed of her character and habits?"

"Indeed, yes! A sweeter and more virtuous girl never lived. She has been carefully reared and educated, and has always been a model of gentleness and refinement."

"Now tell me why you are so anxious about her," said Chief Watts, with a significant glance in the direction of Sheridan Keene.

"Because she is mysteriously missing from her home," said Dr. Lawton, speaking hurriedly in his agitation. "She went away day before yesterday evening, without even intimating her intentions, and has not returned. Such conduct on her part is unprecedented. She invariably has been a very dutiful and considerate girl. She fairly worships her aunt, my wife, and would not willingly have caused her such anxiety and distress by a voluntary disappearance of this kind. My wife is almost distracted."

"I can vouch for all this," interposed Mr. Wade, speaking with some eagerness. "Tillie Mason is a girl who would not have voluntarily have committed this indiscretion."

Sheridan Keene glanced across at the pale, effeminate face of the speaker, and did not quite fancy the expression of the young

man's insipid blue eyes; but the thought that rose in his mind was dispelled by Chief Watts, who turned his chair nearer that of the clergyman and demanded, shortly:

"Has your niece, Tillie Mason, any other relatives here in town or in the suburbs?"

"Only a cousin who lives in Providence."

"Does she ever visit her?"

"The cousin is a gentleman, sir," replied Dr. Lawton, gravely shaking his head. "I have telegraphed to Providence, and Tillie has not been seen there."

"Did the cousin send you a wire personally?"

"He did so at once, Chief Watts."

"Has Miss Mason ever been to any college or seminary?"

"Yes; she went two years to Vassar."

"Did she make any intimate friends while there, whom she may have visited at this time, and without having informed you of her intention?"

"She made friends, no doubt, but I cannot for a moment believe she left home to visit any of them," replied the clergyman, with grave decision. She certainly would have informed me of her intention, or if unexpectedly detained from home she surely would have written or telegraphed, if some extraordinary occasion had not prevented. Moreover, sir, she did not take away with her any clothing or garments, except those she wore."

"At what time did she leave home?"

"About half-past seven Tuesday evening."

"Who was at your house when she left?"

"Only my wife and myself. Including my niece, we are the entire family. I have no children."

"Did you see her shortly before she went?"

"I did, sir," bowed Dr. Lawton, whose anxious eyes steadily met the grave face of his questioner, as if he there would seek some encouraging sign. "I was seated with my wife in the library. Tillie came to the door with her things on, and said she was going out for a time. It is not unusual for her to do so on pleasant evenings, and I merely bowed to her over my newspaper. That was the last time I saw her, sir."

The voice of the aged speaker choked over the last sorrowful words, and his anxious

eyes swam with welling tears. He drew forth a silk handkerchief and dried them, but Sheridan Keene could see that he was softly sobbing back of the snowy folds.

Chief Watts began to think there might be something more in the case than mere impulsive apprehension and misgivings. The character of Miss Mason, as described by her uncle, whose integrity and discernment were worthy of consideration, was not that of a wild or impulsive girl, who might be given to doubtful escapades and the conventional duplicity which attaches thereto.

CHAPTER II.

CRIME OR ACCIDENT?

Having established this much to his satisfaction, Chief Watts decided he would detail Sheridan Keene upon the case, and he immediately turned his inquiries more directly upon a line important to detective work pure and simple.

"Have you made any publication of the fact that your niece is missing, Dr. Lawton?" he asked, "through the press or any other channel?"

"No, sir, I have not," was the tremulous reply. "I wish, if possible, to avoid publicity, at least until it becomes absolutely necessary."

"Why so?" demanded Chief Watts. "Surely you have no less faith in Miss Mason's honesty and virtue than you have here expressed? For no other reason than that of her own character, should you demur from making public the fact of her mysterious absence. Why do you not publish the precise facts in the columns of the daily papers?"

"Because, Chief Watts," cried the clergyman, with a sudden outburst of fervor; "I feel here in my own heart that the public cannot help me in this distressing hour. I am already satisfied that Tillie has not voluntarily left home, and that she is being prevented from returning, or even communicating with us. If this is so, the public cannot help her or me; and I now suppress the facts only to spare her needless notoriety, should she be safely restored to me, which God speed!"

"Well, there is something in that," admitted Chief Watts, with a genuine appreciation of the clergyman's motives. "I will do what I can for you, Dr. Lawton, since you wish to withhold the facts from the public at present. I will detail Detective Keene upon the case, and he will investigate it. Now answer me a few questions."

"I thank you very much for your interest, chief," bowed Dr. Lawton, with manifest gratitude. "I will answer any questions to the best of my knowledge."

"Is Miss Mason a pretty girl?"

"Very, sir. She is always noticed because of her beauty."

"Light or dark?"

"Medium, sir, with brown hair and eyes."

"Her figure?"

"About the ordinary size, I think, sir; yet——"

"Oh, she is larger than the ordinary, my dear doctor," young Mr. Wade interposed, with much interest and feeling. "She is a very beautiful girl, Chief Watts, and her figure is strikingly perfect. I have heard Tillie say that, when at Vassar and in practice in the gymnasium, her measurements and proportions were very near the classical model."

"Then, Mr. Wade, she is a woman who might attract the attention of evil-minded men you think?" inquired Chief Watts.

"I know that she always attracts attention," replied Wade.

"Is she inclined to personal display? By that I mean, does she enjoy drawing men's attention to her?"

"Oh, no, sir! far from it," cried Dr. Lawton, with fervent assurance. "Tillie is modesty itself."

"Dr. Lawton is right in that," supplemented Wade, with a corroborative bow.

Chief Watts accepted their testimony, yet he made a slight sign to Sheridan Keene.

"Now, Dr. Lawton," he continued, "where is your residence?"

"On Beacon street, near the Bay State road."

"And Miss Mason left there at half-past seven Tuesday evening?"

"Within a few minutes of that hour, sir."

"How was she dressed?"

"In a blue cloth suit with a mink cape."

"Was that the suit she wore at dinner that evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then on leaving home she evidently had not changed her dress for any special occasion?"

"I am sure she had not."

"Her hat?"

"She wore a hat of red velvet, with a rim navy blue beneath."

"Did she habitually wear jewelry that would attract attention?"

"She wore next to none, sir. She is not fond of jewelry."

"What have her habits been when at home, Dr. Lawton? Has she any special employment?"

"Not as a vocation, sir, for she is an heiress and worth considerable in her own name. She maintains some of her studies, however, and is very fond of music and the arts. She is a girl of considerable culture, sir."

"You say she is fond of the arts? Does she paint?"

"No, sir; but she sketches very nicely."

"Does she take music lessons?"

"Yes, sir; once a week."

"From a teacher at home or elsewhere?"

"She goes to the conservatory, sir."

"Has she any other duties that take her regularly from the house, and in one direction?"

"None, sir," replied Dr. Lawton, wondering why these questions were of material importance.

But Chief Watts left him to wonder. That they were of importance may safely be assumed, or Chief Watts would not have asked them.

"You say," he continued, "that your niece is wealthy? Is her wealth inherited from her parents, one or both?"

"From her father. He left Tillie several hundred thousand dollars."

"In trust?"

"Yes, sir. The trustee is Judge Gibbons, of the Superior Court."

"Are there any relatives who might have been disappointed because of this legacy?"

"None, sir. Mr. Mason's will was probated ten years ago."

"We will come down to something more recent," nodded the chief. "I shall detain you only a few moments longer. Has Miss Mason many gentlemen friends?"

"She has many friends, sir, both ladies and gentlemen," said the clergyman, gravely, "but none with whom she is especially intimate. There is a tacit understanding that she will, some time in the near future marry this gentleman here, Mr. Wade, but the engagement has not yet been announced."

"Then, Dr. Lawton," said Chief Watts, slowly, "you absolutely know of no possible occasion or person to which or whom this mysterious disappearance of your niece could be reasonably attributed?"

"I do not," Chief Watts," said the clergyman, with grave sincerity. "I am in darkness as great as my distress. I would give all I possess to have Tillie restored to my arms, for I love her as a daughter. I beg that you will leave no stone unturned to find her, and that you will spare no expense to that end."

"What have you done in the matter before coming to me?"

"I waited until yesterday morning, hoping the mail would bring some word from my niece," explained Dr. Lawton. "When I received none, I wired to Providence, also to two of Tillie's college friends. In response to those messages I received only negative replies. Meantime, I consulted Mr. Wade, thinking Tillie might possibly be with him, and also visited several of the neighbors."

"All of which was in vain," said Mr. Wade, sadly. "As for me, I have not seen Tillie since Sunday evening. I called to see her last night."

"The case seems to be rather a curious one," observed Chief Watts, turning now to Sheridan Keene. "I think you had better look into it, and see what you can learn."

"Very well, chief," bowed the detective.

"I presume, Dr. Lawton, you have a photograph of Miss Mason."

"Yes, sir; several of them."

"With you?"

"Unfortunately they are at home. I was so anxious this morning that I started out

early and sought Mr. Wade. I did not even think of coming here, or I should have brought a photograph. It was Mr. Wade's suggestion that I should appeal to the police for aid."

"I see," nodded Chief Watts.

"Will it not be well, chief," said Keene in an undertone; "if I go up to the doctor's house and see what I can observe there?"

"Yes, I think so," he replied. "You then can get one of the pictures. Also have a talk aside with the doctor's wife. Women sometimes make confidants of women, you know."

"I understand."

Chief Watts turned to his visitors, then rose to his feet.

"Detective Keene will go home with you, Dr. Lawton, and look at the photograph of Miss Mason," he explained, gravely. "You had better go at once, and he will proceed upon the case without delay. His reports will come to me, and I will lend him what aid I can."

"Thank you, Chief Watts!" exclaimed Dr. Lawton, with gratitude. "You will spare no expense to find this missing girl?"

"I will do all in my power, I assure you," bowed the chief.

Dr. Lawton turned to his younger companion:

"Will you go with me, Ben, or must you now go to your business?" he asked, with a voice that never for a moment lost its tremor of anxiety.

"With you! With you, doctor!" Wade hurriedly exclaimed. "I could not think of leaving you before Tillie has been restored to us. I am by far too anxious to even think of business. I am going with you, doctor."

"Very well."

"And I beg of you, Chief Watts, and you, Detective Keene, to command me in any way possible."

"I will bear it in mind, Mr. Wade," replied Sheridan Keene, with a nod of approval. "Very likely you will be able to assist me in some way."

"Don't fail to command me, then."

The detective bowed again.

"Come, then," he said quickly. "We will take a carriage in the square."

CHAPTER III.

FOUR PHOTOGRAPHS.

The three men took a carriage in Pemberton square and were driven immediately to Dr. Lawton's house, their way taking them through attractive Beacon street and by famous Boston Common, then barren of its famous foliage. The doctor's residence was nearly out to Bay State road, and was one of the new, less pretentious dwellings of that cultured and attractive locality.

A maid-servant admitted them and the clergyman led the way through a sumptuous reception hall, and then to a fine library at the rear of the house, the broad windows of which overlooked the waters of the Charles and the distant city of Cambridge. With half an eye, Sheridan Keene decided this to be a home from which no sane girl would voluntarily have fled, possibly to have accepted thereby the disgrace and ostracism which must have followed such an impropriety.

Almost immediately they were joined by the clergyman's wife, a motherly woman some years his junior, and whose agitated inquiries concerning the result of their efforts that morning indicated her intense anxiety.

With her came a young woman, one of the neighbors, and a friend of the missing girl. She had been confidentially informed of the distressing situation, and was remaining at the house to afford Mrs. Lawton what comfort and encouragement she was able.

The clergyman presented the detective to both women, and explained the situation in a few grave words. In the presence of his wife, Dr. Lawton bore himself with a composure which at once revealed to Sheridan Keene his affectionate and manly solicitude.

The detective at once came to his business.

"I would like to see any photographs of Miss Mason that you may have, Mrs. Lawton," he said, kindly. "We shall do all in our power to locate the girl, and restore her to you as quickly and quietly as possible."

"God give you help!" exclaimed Mrs. Lawton, fervently, with a grateful pressure of the young detective's hand. "I will get you the photographs at once."

She produced one from an elaborate

album on the table, and several others from a fancy receptacle occupying a cabinet against the wall. Sheridan Keene received them with a bow, and then drew aside to one of the windows to consider them without interruption.

To this student of Lavater a photograph appealed with far more significance than to an ordinary observer. Those he now held presented characteristics which at once startled him by their import, yet he gave no sign of the inferences he immediately drew. The pictures were four in number, and had been taken at various times during the past year, he had been informed. The face was that of a very beautiful girl, with rare expressive eyes, a broad, intellectual brow, and an abundance of wavy hair. The mouth and chin indicated firmness of character, and the poise of the head a certain degree of natural dignity and pride. Keene quickly decided that the rector was right in declaring that Tillie Mason had not voluntarily deserted her home and her friends. His deductions went further than this, moreover.

Only one of the photographs was in street attire, evidently taken the previous winter. One of the other three was in conventional evening costume, and the remaining two were in a much more fanciful and picturesque attire, displaying amid a profusion of delicate laces the girl's perfectly formed neck and shoulders, and producing an effect of almost classical beauty.

Sheridan Keene smiled within himself, and turning to his waiting observers, said inquiringly:

"I think I understood you to say, Mrs. Lawton, that all of these pictures had been taken within the past twelve months."

"Yes, sir," Mrs. Lawton came forward to reply. "The last, that in your right hand and in fanciful costume, was taken about three months ago."

"And I presume all of the pictures are tolerably good likenesses of Miss Mason?"

"Very good, indeed, sir. Tillie always took an excellent picture."

"These will help me in locating her, thank you," bowed Keene, with grave courtesy.

"Do you wish to retain them?"

"No, I don't think I shall need to take

them away with me. I have a faculty for remembering faces, and shall not easily forget so lovely a one as this. I shall not require to see them again."

He returned the photographs while speaking, but he did not say what astute deductions he had made from these tell-tale bits of pasteboard. Yet the frequency with which these pictures had been taken, and the characteristics marking three of the four, had told Sheridan Keene as plainly as if imparted from the lips of the girl herself, that Tillie Mason, despite her inherent modesty, cherished in secret a girlish pride in her pretty face and symmetrical figure, and had indulged perhaps a pardonable vanity in this artistic display of herself.

Only a clever and discerning man, a shrewd analyst of character, and a deep reasoner, could possibly have drawn conclusions as astute as these. Sheridan Keene already suspected that he had the solution of this mystery well in hand; but even Sheridan Keene sometimes ran against difficulties which would have defeated most men."

"If you please, Mrs. Lawton," he now said; "I would like to have you take me alone to Miss Mason's chamber."

"Certainly, Mr. Keene," she readily assented. "There is no objection to that. I will go with you."

"If you will be so kind."

Leaving the others, Mrs. Lawton led the detective up one flight of stairs, and into the rear room above the library. It was a beautiful chamber, furnished in light blue, and evincing all the characteristics of a girl of exquisite taste and refinement. A pretty desk, the top of which was open, stood in one corner, and almost immediately caught the detective's eye.

"Have you examined Miss Mason's desk, Mrs. Lawton, to learn if she has left any missive for you, or has received any correspondence that might explain her absence?" he asked, gravely.

"Oh, yes, sir!" Mrs. Lawton exclaimed. "I have thoroughly examined the desk, and have found absolutely nothing of an explanatory nature."

"No letters?"

"None at all, sir, bearing upon this dreadful affair.

"No telegrams, or telephone calls?"

"Not one, sir."

"What are these, Mrs. Lawton?" asked Keene, and he glanced at a portfolio beside the desk.

"They are sketches and studies in drawing," was the reply. "Tillie is much interested in that kind of work."

"May I look the sketches over?"

"Certainly, sir."

The detective placed the portfolio upon the desk to make a brief examination of its contents. Most of the sheets were crayon or pencil sketches. A few were landscape and water views, but the greater part were anatomical drawings, in mere sections. They would have suggested but very little indeed to an ordinary observer; to Sheridan Keene they suggested volumes. Presently he laid aside the portfolio and signed Mrs. Lawton to a chair.

"I wish you would now answer a few questions for me," he said, gravely, still standing in the floor.

"Willingly, sir," bowed Mrs. Lawton.

"Is your niece, Miss Mason, a girl of cheerful temperament?"

"She has a cheerful and very sweet disposition, sir," was the reply, with some wonderment at the question, "but is by no means what is commonly termed flighty."

"Is she lively about the house?"

"Not particularly, sir; she is rather inclined to be quiet and serious.

"Of a rather thoughtful disposition, with an interest in things worth considering? In fact, a girl of considerable stability?"

"That expresses it, sir."

"Have you lately noticed any change in her?"

"In what way, sir?"

"That of noticeable reserve, or self-absorption, as if she had something unusual on her mind," Keene explained.

"Why, yes, now that you speak of it, I have," replied Mrs. Lawton, readily. "I think Tillie has lately been more serious, and inclined to remain in the solitude of her own chamber. Pray, sir, what do you infer from that?"

"Nothing at all significant," smiled Keene, with grave courtesy. "I wish merely to inform myself of the girl's disposition."

"Ah, yes, sir, I see," bowed Mrs. Lawton, with a faint sigh, as if she had drawn some faint encouragement from the manner and questions of the officer.

"Have you noticed anything curious in her conduct?"

"I can't say that I have."

"Is she at home most of the time during the day?"

"Yes, sir; generally."

"I think your husband told me that she visited the conservatory regularly."

"Once a week, sir, to take her music lesson."

"Aside from that, has she lately been out more frequently than, say, six months ago?"

Mrs. Lawton looked up with a startled expression in her eyes.

"Why, yes, she has!" she exclaimed, impulsively. "Still I have not thought much about it. She has been out in the morning quite regularly of late. Really, sir, you already seem to know more about her actions than I do."

Sheridan Keene laughed softly.

"Constant companionship frequently blinds, they say," he said, lightly. "Has Miss Mason ever told you where she has been mornings?"

"No, sir. In fact I never gave the matter much thought."

"Did you ever ask her a direct question about it?"

"Not that I can now recall, sir."

"How long a time was she usually absent when out in the morning?"

"She usually came home about her lunch hour, one o'clock," replied Mrs. Lawton. "And she often brought with her some small parcel, which indicated to me that in all probability she had been out shopping, hence I thought nothing special about her going."

"I see," nodded Sheridan Keene, as indeed he did.

"Your husband did not inform me of this absence of his niece mornings. Doesn't he know of it?"

"Well, sir, I don't think he ever has no-

ticed it. Dr. Lawton is usually engaged in his study during the entire morning."

"That probably explains it," smiled Sheridan Keene; now deciding that Tillie Mason had taken these opportunities for some outside excursions, the true character of which she had not yet disclosed.

"I shall detain you only a few moments longer," he continued, consulting his watch. "I want to know if Miss Mason has confided to you anything relative to her engagement to Mr. Wade?"

"We never have discussed it except in a general way, sir," replied Mrs. Lawton, with another look of surprise.

"Has there been a definite time set for the marriage?"

"No, sir. The engagement even has not been announced."

"Has Miss Mason been making preparations for the marriage?"

"Only in a very small way, sir. It probably will not occur for a year at least, as Mr. Wade first wishes to firmly establish his business."

"What is his business?"

"He is in real estate, sir."

"Then Miss Mason has not said anything special to you, relative to her marriage or her affections for Mr. Wade?"

"Nothing more than one might expect under the circumstances. What do you imagine she might have said, may I ask?"

"Nothing at all," Sheridan Keene smiled, curiously. "I very rarely indulge in imaginings, Mrs. Lawton, and at present am only seeking for some clue that may lead to an explanation of Miss Mason's sudden and mysterious disappearance. I think that is all at present, Mrs. Lawton, and I will not detain you here any longer."

They returned to the library in company.

"Will you remain for lunch?" Mr. Lawton immediately asked of Keene. "I will have it served at once, if you will."

But Sheridan Keene quickly shook his head.

"No, I thank you, doctor," he replied, with a bow; "I wish to get at work upon this case as soon as possible and will get my lunch down town."

"Can you say nothing to me of an en-

couraging nature, Mr. Keene?" said the clergyman, with a look of appeal in his anxious eyes.

"No more than Chief Watts said to you this morning, sir," replied Keene, gravely. "I think, however, that I would not feel too apprehensive concerning Miss Mason's personal safety."

"I thank you for that much, sir," was the grateful reply. "Will you remain here to lunch, Mr. Wade?"

Wade turned to the detective.

"Not if Mr. Keene will allow me to go with him," he replied. "I may be able to help him in some way, in which case I shall stick to him like a brother. What do you say, Detective Keene?"

"That you may come along with me if you wish," said Sheridan Keene, with rather an odd intonation. "I think I may find a way in which you can aid me."

CHAPTER IV.

DETECTIVE KEENE'S SUDDEN REMARK.

"Hold on!" said Mr. Wade, as he and Detective Keene emerged to the street. "The cars are too slow for me in my present state of mind. We will engage the cab yonder. Hi, there, cabbie! Drive over here, and look sharp!"

The cabman, though a block away, heard and waved his hand in response, then hastened to gather up his reins.

Sheridan Keene halted in the sidewalk just in front of the rector's house, and glanced curiously at his companion.

Wade's vociferous summons had broken with startling abruptness the quietude of the aristocratic avenue. His eagerness to begin the search for the lost heiress whom he aspired to wed, was, to say the least, commendable and consistent in the young man, despite his very nervous manner and effeminate countenance. Keene decided that he was a bolder and more energetic fellow than he had at first inferred.

Yet he growled, disapprovingly:

"Hold your tongue! Do you want to rouse the entire neighborhood? Whistle to a cabman when you want one. They respond to a whistle as readily as a dog."

"The neighborhood can stand it, I guess," returned Wade, half laughing. "I am too nervous to contain myself longer."

"There's nothing in that, my man. Get aboard."

"Where are you going first?"

"To Vercelli's for lunch. Detectives eat, along with other failings," dryly answered Keene, thrusting him into the cab which had drawn up at the curbing. "Did you hear, cabbie?"

"Sure, sir! Vercelli's."

"Look sharp, then."

And Sheridan Keene sprang into the cab, banging the door behind him, and the vehicle was off and away down Beacon street before the detective had fairly settled himself in the seat beside Benjamin Wade.

"Now what do you know about this affair?" Keene at once demanded, plainly. "Let's have the whole story."

Wade turned like a flash, catching his breath with amazement, then stammered forcibly, with some resentment:

"Know about it? What do you mean, sir? Do you imply that I know more than I have told? If you do, you make a mistake."

"I imply nothing of the kind," said Keene, shortly. "Do not kick over the traces till you are touched with the whip. I mean, what do you know about Tillie Mason more than I have already learned?"

"Oh, is that what you mean?" rejoined Wade, quickly mollified. "I really know nothing more about her than you have been told."

"You are quite sure about that, are you? I want you to come flat-footed with me, understand, man to man; and if you know anything, let's have it. I must begin this search with my eyes open, if it is to result in a discovery of the girl."

Wade replied with a fervor that should have been convincing.

"I know absolutely nothing about her absence, nor about Tillie herself, more than you have been told, Detective Keene. God knows I would do anything in my power to safely restore her to her home."

"Well, well, we will see if it can't be done!" exclaimed Keene, dropping his inquiries and his curt manner. "The case looks

dark enough at present, however. I am blessed if I can fathom it."

"Would you suggest advertising?"

"Not at present. The rector is right about that."

"I suppose he is. Yet it seems to me——"

"Here we are! We will talk it over while lunching."

"I will settle the fares."

"Very well. And by the way," Keene added, turning sharply, "if you have any business to look after, don't let me keep you. There is absolutely nothing you can do to-day."

"I can't think of business," Wade protested, with petulant decisiveness. "I can think of nothing but Tillie. No, no! Let me remain with you. There may be something I can do."

Sheridan Keene offered no further objection, if such the last was intended to have been; and the two men entered the restaurant and took one of the side tables. They were no sooner seated, than Wade ventured to ask with some eagerness:

"Have you decided on any plan, Detective Keene?"

"Plan about what?"

"As to your operations for locating Miss Mason, of course."

"No, I have not."

"What are you going to do first?"

"I don't know, I am sure."

"But something must be done!" Wade exclaimed, staring anxiously at the man opposite, as if scarce able to understand him.

"Perhaps you can suggest something," returned Keene, with considerable point.

Wade colored slightly, but immediately shook his head.

"If a detective of your ability cannot, surely you don't expect it of me," he said. "I am utterly at sea in the matter. I thought detectives always had a regular plan of operations for such a case as this?"

"Plans are shaped by circumstances, and by the evidence discovered, Mr. Wade," Keene answered, pleasantly. "Detective work is not done by rule and square. Methods vary with various cases. Operations must be determined by discoveries and what discoveries indicate. Resort is made to

all sorts of sagacious schemes in order to effect the desired end. For instance, if I were to tell you, point blank, that you are directly responsible for Tillie Mason's sudden and mysterious disappearance — Good God, waiter! catch that man!"

Keene sprang up with the startled interlopation. And a waiter from one of the near tables darted to his assistance. But the attempt of both proved vain. For, as the last word issued from the lips of the detective, Ben Wade, who had swayed slightly in his chair, with eyes rolled backward in his head, pitched sidewise from his seat and fell with a crash to the restaurant floor.

"The man has fainted!" exclaimed Sheridan Keene, bending over him, and dashing a glass of water in the face of the prostrate man. "Bring a pony of brandy, waiter! Look lively!"

The waiter hastened to obey, while a crowd of Vercelli's startled patrons gathered at the scene of the disturbance, eager to render aid. No assistance was needed, however; for Wade presently revived, coming to himself with a gasp and sigh, and was assisted back to his chair.

"I am all right now," he said, faintly, draining the stimulant which Keene placed to his lips. "I don't see what knocked me off my pins so suddenly. It must have been the excitement, or the odor of food. I have eaten nothing since yesterday, Dr. Lawton came so early this morning."

"You are better, are you?" asked Keene, with solicitude.

"Oh, yes, thanks. I am quite myself now. It is not like me to turn my toes up in that way."

"I feared that you might have been affected by my remarks," gravely observed Keene, as he resumed his seat opposite that of his companion. "I felt quite distressed for a moment, lest I thoughtlessly had caused you alarm."

"What remarks were those?" asked Wade, feeling for his handkerchief.

"Pertaining to the girl, you remember," explained Keene. "I said, if I were to charge you with being directly responsible for her disappearance—but before I could

finish, you had popped out of your chair like a cork out of a bottle of Roderer."

"No, I was not affected by your remarks, Detective Keene; far from it," Wade answered, earnestly, and he wiped from his pale brow the moisture which had gathered there in tiny drops. "Miss Mason is more to me than any other person in all the world, and I trust that you do not for a moment think I am guilty of having had anything to do with her distressing disappearance."

"Surely not; surely not!" exclaimed Sheridan Keene, with reassuring candor. "Had I had time to conclude my remarks before you went by the board so abruptly, I should have added that that was but one of the circuitous ways by which detectives attempt to estimate a suspected person's integrity. Not that I suspect you, understand me, Mr. Wade," Keene hastened to add; "I merely was illustrating detectives' methods."

"I see, sir," bowed Wade, adjusting his napkin.

He was now apparently recovered, and the two men dropped the subject during the brief time they allowed themselves for lunch.

It was nearly one o'clock. Sheridan Keene already had laid out the lines of his investigation, subject always to the changes which circumstances might require, and his first step, the lunch being ended, was to rid himself of Wade, which he wished to accomplish without giving further mistrust to the young man, whose interest in Keene's movements was not wholly to the latter's fancy.

The detective accomplished his object with his usual sagacity. He went to the desk in the restaurant and wrote a brief note to Chief Watts, stating the purpose for which he was writing and, having sealed the missive, returned to his companion.

"If you are anxious to assist me, Mr. Wade," he said as they left the restaurant, "there is a little service you now can do me."

"Certainly."

"I want to visit the cab stations and ascertain if any of the drivers can give me any information. Possibly one of them had been employed Tuesday evening by the parties guilty of this abduction, and through him I may be able to trace the criminals."

"A good idea!" exclaimed Wade, approvingly.

"Meantime, I want a line taken to Chief Watts at his office in Pemberton Square. I wish him to detail another man on the case I was investigating yesterday. I find this affair will require me much longer than I at first estimated."

"I see, sir."

"And I wish you to take this letter down to the chief's office, if you have no objection."

"Not at all!" exclaimed Wade, readily. "I will go with it at once."

"Thanks, very much."

"But, say, where can I see you again after having delivered it?"

Keene was inclined to laugh at the fellow's persistency, but suppressed his amusement.

"If I can get around there," he replied, quickly, "I will meet you at Clark's cafe at four o'clock."

"On Washington street?"

"Yes."

"I will wait there till you come."

"All right, Mr. Wade," Keene nodded, agreeably. "It may be after four, but I will turn up there sooner or later. Then I can tell you just what I have accomplished."

This seemed to give eminent satisfaction to Mr. Wade, and the two men shook hands and parted; the latter hurrying away with the message intrusted to him by the detective.

"Well, well; there's a remarkably curious chap. He certainly meant it when he said he'd stick to me like a brother," said Keene to himself. "But I am rid of him for a time, at least, and now I can open up the game unhindered."

He did not visit the cab stations, in which he had, in fact, no interest. He at once took a carriage and was driven to the Boston Art School, where he presently was received in the office of the principal director.

"I am Detective Keene, of the Boston inspectors," he explained, when they were seated. "I am engaged in investigating a very serious affair, the nature of which I am not at liberty to disclose, but which involves the personal safety of one of the community.

I think you may be able to give me, in an indirect way, some assistance."

The director was very much of a gentleman, and readily expressed his willingness.

"I know you by name, Detective Keene," he added, with a complimentary bow. "How can I serve you?"

"To begin with, I would like to look at your list of students."

"Our present list?"

"Say, for six months back."

"This book will inform you, sir. It is an indexed record."

"That will aid me materially," bowed Keene, turning at once to the letter M.

He did not find what he sought, however, the name of Matilda Mason; and he presently returned the volume.

"Do you object to my visiting your main studio?" he asked.

"Not at all," replied the director, rising. "Come out this way."

He led the detective into a large room lighted by several broad windows.

Some thirty students occupied various portions of the room, some at easels, some at tables, and all busily engaged in their work. A few instructors moved here and there among them, and at one side of the room a woman was posing for a group of students in model work.

"It is rather a pleasant vocation," observed Keene, smiling.

"Yes, in some respects," bowed the director.

"The lady occupying the stand yonder is a model, I presume."

"Yes, she is," was the reply. "Her's is a more arduous and less promising business than that of the students. They have at least the hope that is born of ambition."

"True," nodded Keene. "Are these models hired to pose?"

"Oh, yes."

"How many do you generally have on your list?"

"Oh, the list varies constantly. At present we have from six to eight."

"Do you ever have women volunteer their services?"

"Rarely," laughed the director. "It is not

a very desirable task. Sometimes, however, it occurs."

"Have you recently had such a volunteer?"

"Not for a year or more," replied the director. "The last was a girl whose parents wanted a sketch of the young lady in payment for the pose. We don't have many instances of the kind, however."

"I think that is all, then," bowed Sheridan Keene. "And I thank you very much for your kindness."

"Don't mention it, Detective Keene," smiled the director, leading the way out. "Call at any time when you think I can serve you."

"You are very good," bowed Keene, withdrawing.

His mission had resulted in no discovery of importance, but he did not stop with this visit. He spent nearly the entire afternoon in calls at the several art schools in different portions of the city, at each of which the same inquiries and observations were made, and with the same futile end. Next he visited two private studios with the same result, much to his disappointment.

But the renewal of his search on the morrow was destined to be more satisfactory.

It was six o'clock when he rejoined Wade in Clark's cafe, where the latter had been impatiently waiting his arrival.

"I was delayed at the cab headquarters," the detective explained; "and have seen some of the drivers."

"Have you made any discoveries yet?" asked Wade, with an immediate display of eager interest.

"Not as yet," replied Keene, shaking his head. "It is too early in the game. I may have something to report in the morning."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Go home to my dinner, and then have a night's sleep," said Keene, shortly.

"Not a bad idea," admitted Wade, with rather doubtful accents. "May I see you again in the morning?"

"Yes, if you wish."

"I certainly do. Where shall I meet you?"

"Oh, say at the chief's office at ten o'clock."

"Why so late?"

"Because I first want to go to the cab

headquarters. I may be delayed there again, you know."

"Very well," said Wade, apparently satisfied. "I will be at the chief's office at ten o'clock."

CHAPTER IV.

A STUDY IN STONE.

Though his appointment with Ben Wade was not until ten o'clock, Sheridan Keene was out betimes next morning and eager to resume his visit to the studios of Boston's art votaries, in search of something that might shed light upon Tillie Mason's mysterious disappearance.

To his engagement with Wade the detective gave scarce a thought. It had been made only to avoid the persistent companionship of the young man, and Keene had no idea of going out of his own way to keep the appointment. The case was already assuming features which did not permit of conventional scruples.

The city clocks were on the stroke of eight when Detective Keene turned into Boylston street, not far from Park Square, and approached the studio of John Hale, the eminent young sculptor. The hour was rather too early for expecting to find the sculptor at his rooms, but Keene thought he might possibly obtain admission and perhaps acquire from others the information he sought. As to the first he was not doomed to disappointment.

He climbed the stairs leading to Hale's elaborate studio and chambers, and unceremoniously tried the door. He found it unlocked, and immediately entered the studio, which served also as a reception room.

It was a large chamber in the front of the building. There were tapestries at the windows and a heavy Wilton covered the floor. Aside from the general furnishings, which indicated a man of wealth and refinement, there were features which suggested the art and culture of the occupant. In picturesque arrangement about the room there were innumerable pieces of the sculptor's handiwork, statuettes, medallions in bas-relief, casts, models and the like, the general effect of which, in a room otherwise conventionally

furnished, appealed with curious effect to an unaccustomed observer.

But that which appealed with most significance to Sheridan Keene the instant he entered and sent a thrill through his veins, was the figure which occupied alone an alcove at one side of the large chamber.

It was a lifesize study in marble, occupying a low pedestal a few inches higher than the floor. It was the draped figure of a beautiful girl, presenting nude only a part of the trunk, after the Venus de Milo and exhibiting a form of rare if not perfect symmetry and beauty. The pose was superlatively graceful, and the figure eminently striking; but the face of the subject was probably an ideal one, or at least one that served no purpose of Sheridan Keene.

Yet the detective instinctively felt that he here had run the game from cover.

The only animated occupant of the room when Keene entered was a lad of about twelve years, who was busy with a feather duster nearly as large as himself. He came forward when Keene entered, and the latter at once said in that cheerful way which invariably wins a boy's heart:

"Hello, my lad! I suppose I am a little early to hit Mr. Hale?"

"What do you want to hit him for, sir?" demanded the lad. "What's he done to you?"

Keene laughed aloud.

"Must I speak by the card, then? Dear me! how early these Boston youngsters mature," he exclaimed, amusedly. "I presume I should have said, 'I am too early to find Mr. Hale in his studio?'"

"Rather, sir," nodded the lad. "Mr. Hale don't come in till about nine o'clock."

"I suppose I can wait here, my lad?"

"Yes, sir; will you take a chair?"

"I'll look over these odds and ends out here," replied Keene, carelessly throwing off his coat. "Curious lot of truck, isn't it?"

"Mr. Hale might not call it so, sir."

"Not likely, my boy, I'll admit. I shall have to ask Mr. Hale's pardon."

"There'll be no need for it, sir, for I sha'n't tell him."

"Good for you," laughed Keene. "You

are discreet beyond your years. That's quite a figure over there in the alcove, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir; it is."

"Who was the model for that, I wonder? Most of such figures are made from models, aren't they?"

"I think so, sir."

"You don't happen to know who the model was in this case, do you?"

"If I do, I am not allowed to tell."

"That so?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's the idea in that? Anything so very private about it?"

"I can't say as to that, sir," replied the lad, shaking the duster in the statue's face with an audacity which the living subject would have instantly resented. "I only know that I have been told not to say anything about Mr. Hale's models."

"Ah, I see," nodded Keene. "Still, I suppose you know who the model was, don't you?"

"No, sir; I don't."

"How does that happen?"

"Because I have been at work here only two weeks, sir," explained the lad. "Mr. Hale had that figure done before I came here, so I never happened to see the model."

"So far as you know, I suppose you mean?"

"How, sir?"

"I mean that she might have called here since the figure was finished, and you then would have seen her."

"But I shouldn't know her in street clothes!" exclaimed the lad, with artless significance.

Keene laughed deeply.

"You would have to see her just as she stands, eh? Well, well, my lad, you are all right. By the way, who was employed here in your place before you came to work for Mr. Hale?"

"I dunno, sir. Some other boy, I suppose."

"Don't you know his name?"

"No, sir; I never heard it."

"I guess you could find out for me, couldn't you, if I were to make it an object?"

"I might, sir; for——"

"If you were to talk less you would say

less, Johnny, my dear," interrupted a voice from the adjoining room—the sculptor's workroom.

The speaker emerged while giving the utterance of the words, and came upon the scene not a little to the surprise of Sheridan Keene.

She was a young woman of twenty-five or thereabouts, with luminous dark eyes and a very handsome face and figure. The color in her cheeks was rather too steadfast to be natural, the lines of her pretty mouth were firm, and her expression was that of a woman of strong will and forceful nature. She wore her street garments, held her muff in her hand, as if she recently had entered the place, and her dress and general aspect was decidedly of a type termed dashing—that of an adventuress or one of the demi-monde.

The lad showed no surprise when this woman entered from the sculptor's workroom, nor did he resent her comment upon his loquacity. He looked up with a boyish laugh and rejoined artlessly:

"Weren't tongues made to talk with, Miss Bell?"

"Yes, Johnny, and feet were made to run with," replied Miss Bell, patting the lad's head. "Therefore, take this letter and run down to State street with it and wait for an answer. It will save my keeping Mr. Hale waiting should he presently arrive."

The lad offered no objection. In fact, he was willing to enjoy the outside air. He took the missive tendered and snatched his cap from the head of a bust in one corner and hastened out and away.

Miss Bell looked askance at the detective; he had turned aside and was looking from the window into the street below.

The woman hesitated for a moment, then coughed slightly and smilingly said, as the detective turned:

"Beg pardon, sir; were you waiting to see Mr. Hale?"

"Yes, Miss——"

"Bell is my name, sir."

"Yes, Miss Bell, thank you; I am waiting for Mr. Hale," bowed Keene, who was quite equal to reading a woman at her face value.

"He doesn't usually come before nine, sir. Will you take a chair?"

"Presently, thank you. I am rather interested in these various pieces of art. I presume they are Mr. Hale's work."

"Yes, sir; most of them."

"Are you also waiting for him?"

"Oh, yes," said Miss Bell, smiling oddly. "I am employed by him at times."

Keene instantly understood her to be one of the sculptor's models.

"Perhaps you have an appointment with him," he observed, thereby aiming to learn if Hale was likely to put in an appearance.

"Yes, I have one this morning," Miss Bell replied. "I am to pose for his Diana. I infer from what I overheard you say to Johnny, that you were interested in the statue yonder. It is a piece of work of which Mr. Hale is very proud—and fond! You've heard of sculptors falling in love with their own creations in marble, haven't you?"

If this woman thought herself in communication with a man slow to grasp the full significance of a glance, a tone or a gesture, she was overleaping her mount. The laugh with which she had spoken, the subtle insinuation she had made, the voice with which she had given the overt slur—all were given a far deeper significance by Sheridan Keene than the woman intended.

Yet the face of the detective did not change by so much as a shadow. He decided he would give her all the rope she wanted. He laughed lightly, meeting with a responsive glance the flash of her lustrous eyes, and said:

"Yes; I have heard it said of Phidias. But I think if sculptors fell in love with the subjects from which are modeled their creations, they would show better judgment."

Miss Bell responded with a ripple of laughter.

"So do I!" she exclaimed; then added, shortly, "in most cases at least."

"Do you know, Miss Bell, who was the model for this figure?" Keene ventured to inquire, with affected indifference.

Miss Bell shot a quick glance at him and smiled significantly.

"Don't hide your interest because you are talking to me instead of to Johnny," she rejoined, pointedly. "I heard what you said

to him. Why are you so anxious to discover who posed for this figure, sir?"

"Because I rather admire a beautiful woman, and would like to learn the identity of the living reality," said Keene, dryly.

"Ah, indeed! Well, I will not tell you," was the curt response.

"Perhaps Mr. Hale will do so."

"Indeed, he will not."

"No?"

"He's not half so likely to as I am."

"Would you tell me if you knew there was some urgent reason for my knowing?" asked Keene, with a searching scrutiny of her dark eyes, now half-frowning at him from under her brows.

"I don't know that I would," she replied, with a curl of her lips. "It is unprofessional, you know. I am a model myself, but I'd not thank John Hale to generally advertise it."

Keene noticed with what trenchant bitterness she uttered the sculptor's name, but he gave no sign.

"I suppose not," he replied.

"Mr. Hale ought to be here soon."

Again Keene caught himself affected by the woman's tone and remark. The latter was like an invitation for him to press his inquiries—and he accepted it. He drew closer to her, saying in lower tones, yet with semi-subdued intensity:

"See here, Miss Bell, I will make it an object to you to tell me who the model was for that figure. I am not here on a false errand, I will admit. I want to discover who posed for that statue. Will you tell me?"

"What do I get for it?" Miss Bell asked, with curious eyes.

"I will agree to any reasonable terms."

"Ah, you are indeed very anxious to learn," the woman laughed, tauntingly. "I guess I'd better not tell you unless you tell me why you wish to know."

"I will do that!" exclaimed Keene, with his steady gaze never losing a change of her expressive face. "A friend of mine suspects a lady, the one he is about to marry, of posing as a model, and he resents it very deeply. I've been engaged to verify the fact. You shall have half of what I receive if you will tell me who posed for that figure."

"You're sure you are not lying to me?" demanded Miss Bell, with a sharp glance at him.

"Indeed, I'm not. Will you tell me?"

"Suppose I don't."

"I will bring the young man himself to see the statue."

"Would he recognize it?"

"Possibly, though the face is not that of his fiancée."

An ironical laugh broke from Miss Bell's red lips.

"If the face is not hers, pray, how could he recognize her?" she demanded, with scurrilous significance.

Sheridan Keene turned sharp about. There was a step sounding at the foot of the stairs in the adjoining corridor.

"It's Mr. Hale," gasped the woman, quickly.

"Then you'll not tell me?" Keene demanded, in a whisper, seizing Miss Bell's white wrists.

She swung around, and looked at him with startled eyes.

"Will you pay me my price?"

"Yes, on your word!"

"Then meet me at Reynolds' ladies' parlor, at two this afternoon."

"I'll be there! Don't fail me!"

"Not I!"

The last was scarce uttered, when the door opened and John Hale entered his studio. He was a man of twenty-five, tall, finely proportioned, and of strikingly grave and earnest countenance. Taken altogether, he was a man who might have won the heart of almost any woman.

"Good-morning, Jenny," he said, in a deep, mellow voice; then bowed to Keene, and asked: "Were you waiting to see me, sir?"

But Jane Bell answered for the detective.

"No, Mr. Hale," she said, quickly, with a laugh and toss of her head. "He is a friend of mine, who came down with me this morning. You'll have to excuse me now," she added, turning to Keene and winking aside. "I must prepare for my pose."

Keene took the wink for what it was intended, and bowed himself out of the room.

CHAPTER V.

A TELEPHONE MESSAGE.

Sheridan Keene did not go down to the chief's office to meet Wade, neither did he relieve Dr. Lawton with a visit. He had no immediate use for either. The scene at the studio, and the suspicions he had formed, had extended the case to its very circumference, and the closing in was a process he best could accomplish unaided and alone.

He did not waste the morning, however. Though he at present could only assume that Tillie Mason had posed for Hale, and that the latter might possibly have had some reason for wishing her to be out of the way, Sheridan Keene resolved to act upon the mere assumption, together with his other suspicions, and he at once sought the neighborhood of the Bay State road.

He had figured out, in his own incisive way, how such an abduction as he had in mind might have been accomplished; and for an hour or more he devoted himself to visiting the various public telephone stations in the immediate neighborhood of Dr. Lawton's residence.

In one of these, the last he entered, and which was less than five minutes' walk from the rector's house, Keene made the discovery and acquired the information he had shrewdly anticipated.

The station was one of the company's offices, and a bright young woman was in charge when the detective entered.

"I am one of the inspectors of police," Keene explained, "and I wish you to answer a few questions for me, which may aid me in clearing up a case that I am investigating."

The girl nodded understandingly, and allowed the detective to draw her aside from two operators who were at the switch-board.

"Now, sir, I am ready," she said, smiling. "I will assist you, if I can."

"Thank you," bowed Keene. "And please tax your memory as to the circumstances. Are you on duty afternoons and evenings?"

"Nearly always, sir."

"Were you here last Tuesday evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you recall if any lady came in here to use one of the telephones?"

"About what time, sir?"

"That is what I want you to tell me, if you can," smiled Keene.

"Wait one minute, please, till I look over my Tuesday slips," said the girl. "It will take me but a minute."

"Very well."

The detective waited patiently, and presently the girl returned, bearing a slip between her fingers.

"Yes, sir, there was a lady who called here and sent a message," she said. "I remember it distinctly, now, sir."

"And the hour?"

"It was about five o'clock, sir. I was here alone at the time, my assistant having gone to her dinner."

"Can you describe her?"

"Not her face, sir, for she wore a veil."

"Can you tell if she was young or old?"

"She was a young lady, sir, I am sure," the girl quickly answered. "I could tell that by her figure."

"What style of figure did she have?"

"She was quite good size, sir, and very nicely formed. I noticed it at the time."

"Do you remember how she was dressed?" asked Keene, well pleased with the information he was acquiring.

"Yes, sir," nodded the girl. "I can tell you in a general way. She had on a blue suit, I think it was of a light shade, and wore a fur cape."

"Did she wear a bonnet?"

"No, sir. She wore a felt hat, with a rim blue underneath."

"Oh, yes! that is very good," bowed Keene.

"Is she the person you are seeking?"

"I am not sure yet," he replied. "Can you tell me to whom she telephoned?"

"I can by looking up the number."

"Do so, please."

There was another brief delay, and then the girl reported:

"She called up John Hale, of Boylston street."

"You are sure of that?"

"Positively, sir," said the girl, decisively. "I remember it distinctly, for I was at the switch-board at the time, and was considerably delayed in getting a response to my call."

"Thank you very much," said Keene,

gravely. "By the way, don't you sometimes hear communications from the closet yonder?"

"Oh, yes; and I did in this instance, sir."

"Better and better!" exclaimed the detective. "Can you tell me in a general way of what the woman's message consisted?"

"It was merely an appointment to meet Mr. Hale that evening, sir."

"Did the woman give Hale her name?"

"No, sir," replied the girl. "She merely stated to him that she was his friend of Beacon street."

"Ah, yes! Do you know what answer Hale made?"

"I know only that he consented to meet her, and I judged he was pleased," said the girl, laughing.

"Do you know where the lady requested him to meet her?"

"On the draw of the Cambridge bridge, sir; the upper one."

"And the time?"

"At eight o'clock, sir."

"Was there anything more said, that you can now recall?"

"Not that I think of, sir," replied the girl. "That was about all of their conversation, or at least the tenor of it."

"Did the woman then depart?"

"Yes, sir; after having paid me."

"And you did not see her face?"

"I did not, sir."

"Then you could not identify her?"

"I think I might know her figure, sir," was the slow rejoinder. "Yet there are many nicely-formed women, and I could not be sure of it."

"That is all, then," bowed Keene. "I am very much obliged to you. By the way, say nothing about these inquiries, please."

"I will not, sir."

It was nearly one o'clock when Keene hastened to the street, and he at once went to the precinct police station near the Cambridge bridge, where he found the captain at his desk, by whom he was instantly recognized.

"Hello, Inspector Keene!" he said in greeting.

"Good morning, Captain," bowed the detective, as they shook hands. "I've an ap-

pointment down town at two, and am in some haste. I want to see your officer who patrols the Cambridge bridge after seven o'clock in the evening."

"That's Officer Mahon," said the captain, quickly. "He is not here, now, but I can have him for you in ten minutes."

"Do so, please."

Keene waited rather longer than the time mentioned, but the officer ultimately appeared, and the detective drew him aside.

"Your beat is on Cambridge bridge evenings, Officer Mahon?" asked Keene.

"Yes, sir."

"You were on duty Tuesday night, I am told."

"Yes, sir."

"There was an appointment made between two parties to meet there, a man and a girl. They were to meet on the draw that evening at eight o'clock. Did you see anything significant of that meeting?"

The officer thought in silence for a moment.

"I did not see any girl, sir; but I did see a man on the draw, and passed him twice. I thought, then, he might be waiting for somebody."

"Describe him!"

"He was a tall man, dark, with a pointed beard——"

"That's sufficient," Keene interposed, quickly, satisfied that the man was John Hale. "Do you know if he met the girl?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know how long he remained waiting?"

"I saw him first about half-past seven, sir, and again at eight. I did not see him after that."

"That's all," said Keene, sharply. "Much obliged."

Then he shook hands with the officer and captain, and made his departure.

It was nearly one o'clock.

Taking a north-bound car, Sheridan Keene now went down town and devoted a half-hour to lunch. Then he hastened to the Reynolds, to keep his appointment with Jane Bell, the sculptor's treacherous model.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TREACHERY OF JANE BELL.

At precisely two o'clock, Keene entered the Reynolds Hotel, and made his way to the ladies' parlor. He was not without some misgivings that the Bell girl might prove false to him, as she had appeared willing to be false to Hale for a remuneration; but, to his intense satisfaction, he observed, on entering the parlor, that the girl was waiting for him in an obscure corner.

She came forward at once, on seeing him approach, and joined him almost on the threshold.

"I don't want to be seen here with you," she whispered, with her eyes glowing brightly through the meshes of her veil. "Can't you get a private room?"

"Certainly, if you wish," assented Keene, readily.

"I do," she said. "It might cost me my occupation, if Hale were to discover that I am not to be trusted."

"Wait here, then, and I'll engage a room and get a key."

"I will wait for you in the side corridor yonder," whispered the girl. "I don't dare meet you again in the parlor, for fear someone who knows one or both of us may see me."

"All right," nodded Keene. "I will not be gone very long, and will join you out yonder."

"Very well."

The detective hastened down to the hotel office and secured one of the private parlors, and presently rejoined Jane Bell in the corridor indicated.

"Come this way," he said, softly. "I know the location of the room. I asked the clerk about it."

"So much the better."

The girl was evidently nervous. The glow was bright in her eyes, yet her cheeks had grown pale since morning, and even her lips had lost some of their crimson color. But she followed close at the detective's elbow, and he led the way to the room he had secured, and closed the door.

The girl heaved a sigh of relief.

"Order me a drink," she said, shortly,

throwing off her veil. "I am shaking worse than I did in my first pose."

"What will you drink?" asked Keene, laughing.

"Hot sherry," said Miss Bell, without a moment's indecision. "It acts quickest on me, and I want something that will act quick."

"Why are you so nervous?" asked Keene, pressing the annunciator. "Your life's not at stake."

"Oh, I know all about that," the girl rejoined. "But I have a living to earn, just the same; and if Hale should know of this little episode, there's no studio in town in which I would be received. I guess I know what I am about."

Sheridan Keene decided that she did.

"I shall not betray you to Hale," he said, reassuringly.

"I don't expect you will," she replied. "You don't look like that sort of a man; I am rather over the average in taking a man's measure. Yet I am tolerably well known here, and I presume you are, if you are a detective; and it might come to John Hale's ears that we had been seen together here."

"That's true," smiled Keene. "I never thought of that."

"I was a fool to meet you here," added Miss Bell; "but I suggested the first place that came into my mind this morning. Hale entered so unexpectedly, that I thought I'd better get rid of you at once, so I said anything that came into my head."

"Oh, I guess we shall be safe enough here."

"I hope so. We are, now, at all events; and we might as well stay here. We'd be done up by going out now, as surely as later."

A knock upon the door announced the arrival of the stimulant which Miss Bell had requested, and Sheridan Keene took the tray from the waiter without admitting him, and gave the girl her drink. She drained the glass before speaking, and then said, with a loud cluck of her tongue:

"Thanks! That will set me right. Now let's get down to business."

"The sooner the better," said Keene, dryly. "That's what I am here for."

He drew a chair nearer that which Jane Bell had taken, but the latter opened the dis-

cussion with a business-like celerity that at once indicated her to be a woman of the world.

"In the first place, where do I come in at the finish?" she demanded, flashing her sharp eyes at the detective, with a searching gaze. "What do I make, providing you get the information you are seeking?"

"Well," said Keene, thoughtfully; "you shall have half of what I receive, providing I can prove that a certain girl posed for the figure I saw in Hale's studio."

"And how much is that?"

"Your part will be one hundred dollars."

"Do you get two hundred?"

"Naturally, since I give you half."

"How do I know I will get my half?" demanded Jane Bell, with a rather doubtful squint at her hearer.

"Well, I guess you will have to take my word for it," said Keene, smiling oddly. "Or, stay, I will give you a retainer at once, as they say in law. Here's a twenty-dollar note for the starter, and to bind the bargain. I give you my word that I will give you the balance, if your information proves reliable."

The girl took the note, curled it around her forefinger, and then thrust it into the bosom of her dress.

"That's good enough for me," she said, shortly, with a mingled smile and leer at the detective. "Now, one thing more."

"What's that?" asked Keene, who never lost the slightest outward expression of the girl's character.

"I want you to promise that you will not betray me to Hale, nor to any other person," she replied.

"I give you my word, I will not."

"Cross your throat!"

"I'll do that," laughed Keene, rather tickled by the occasional levity in which the girl indulged.

"Now order me another drink!"

"And that," assented the detective, rising to comply.

"Now then, it's up to you, as the saying is," laughed Jane Bell, when he resumed his seat opposite her. "What do you want to know?"

"First, the model's name," said Sheridan

Keene, with his eyes fixed on the girl's steadily flushing face.

Jane Bell cleared her throat, as if the betrayal did not come with perfect ease; and answered curtly:

"The model's name is Mason."

"Don't you know her first name?"

"I have heard Hale call her Tillie. I suppose that is short for Matilda, isn't it?"

"No doubt of it," assented Keene.

"Is that the name you expected?" demanded Miss Bell, with a curious smile.

"Yes, it is," Keene replied, nodding. "Do you know where the girl lives?"

"On Beacon street, I think."

"Don't you know?"

"Well, yes, I know. She lives on Beacon street."

"Why didn't you say so, then?"

"Because I didn't agree to tell all I know," retorted Jenny Bell, curtly.

"You will not lose anything by so doing," Keene replied, assuasively. "Are you acquainted with Miss Mason?"

"I should say not!" exclaimed the girl, with a contemptuous toss of her head. "Miss Mason isn't in my class."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that she's one of the swell set. She swims in the same tank with the Four Hundred. You don't imagine, do you, that she has posed for John Hale open and above board? Well, well, I should say not! She always came alone and veiled, on the strict Q T, as it were."

"Is that so?"

"Sure thing! It's my opinion she's a bit stuck on her own shape, and that Hale took advantage of that, and persuaded her to do the posing. Probably she wanted to see herself in marble, and he had no great difficulty in gaining her consent. But it has all been done on the sly, mind you."

"How did you happen to know of it, then?" asked Keene, rather pointedly.

"Because I am in and out of Hale's studio nearly every day, and I have two eyes and two ears, which my brains have taught me to use to the best advantage."

"I see," laughed Keene. "You are rather a clever woman."

"I know my business."

"Also that of a few others, I imagine," said Keene, dryly.

"Now, what do you know about the existing relations between Hale and Tillie Mason?"

"Well, I am not sure," said Jane Bell, evasively.

"What do you think?"

"Well, I think he had been making love to her."

"What leads you to think so?"

"The same old eyes and ears," laughed the girl.

"Are you not sure of it?"

"I said I wasn't; but I am," she now admitted, with an odd smile. "I have listened and heard Hale talking to her, and I know well enough that they are quite as friendly as they ought to be."

"Would you testify to that in court, if necessary?"

"Why not, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Bell, with a shrug of her shoulders. "But I don't want it to appear that I have disclosed their relations!"

"I'll take care to prevent that," replied Sheridan Keene. "You shall not be implicated in any way whatever."

"That's good enough for me, sir."

"Now, what sort of a man is Hale, as you have observed him?"

"Oh, he's good enough in his own way," was the reply. "But he has a devil's own temper, when it is roused."

"I see," nodded Keene. "I suppose, if he thought himself in any very serious scrape, he would not shrink from something desperate, would he?"

"I will wager he would not," said Miss Bell, instantly. "But there's nothing like that in the wind, is there?"

"Nothing that I know of as yet," replied the detective, shaking his head. "Is this all you can tell me about them?"

"Isn't that enough?" demanded the girl, with a quick upward glance at his earnest eyes.

"Well, it's much better than nothing," was the reply. "I take it for granted that you will say nothing outside about this interview."

"Well, I should say not, sir!"

"I also will keep it secret, then," said Sheridan Keene. "Where can I see you to give you the balance of the money, when this has been brought to a head?"

"Anywhere you say."

"You are in Hale's occasionally, you stated?"

"Yes, nearly every day."

"I will see you in the street doorway about noon to-morrow," suggested Keene. "How will that suit you?"

"It will suit me all right."

"Be there at that hour, then, and I will give you the balance of the money."

"All right, sir," nodded Miss Bell, extending her hand. "With that eighty dollars coming, you may count on my being prompt."

"I will not fail you," said Keene, shortly. "Do you want I should go out of here ahead of you?"

"Yes, sure! I will follow you presently."

"Good-by, then."

"Good-by."

The detective pressed her hand, smiling down into the dark eyes she raised to his, then withdrew from the room and the house.

CHAPTER VII.

AN APPROACHING CRISIS.

For reasons of his own, Sheridan Keene made it a point to leave the Reynolds Hotel behind him as quickly as possible. He had no idea of permitting Miss Jane Bell, whom he rightly inferred was as clever and designing a woman as one ordinarily encounters, to discover any of the motives by which he was actuated, as she very possibly might have done had he allowed her to leave the hotel in advance of him, or if he now left her the opportunity of tracing his movements.

He slipped around the corner and across Washington street, then entered one of the large dry goods stores, where he evaded possible pursuit in the moving throng of people.

Half an hour later he entered the private office of Chief Inspector Watts, in Pemberton Square.

"Well, Inspector Keene, you are quite a stranger," said the chief, looking up when the detective entered, and signing him to a chair.

"I take it you have been busy."

"Rather busy, Chief Watts," smiled Sheridan Keene, accepting a cigar.

"Are you rounding up the game?"

"I am getting to it by degrees, chief," was the reply. "I shall require about one more day, I think."

"Have you discovered the missing heir-ess?"

"Not yet, sir," said Keene, shaking his head. "If you have time, just now, I'll report the case as I see it."

"In just a moment," bowed Chief Watts.

He turned to his desk and affixed his signature to several documents, which he presently called his secretary to receive, then turned again to the waiting detective.

"Now, Inspector Keene, I can hear you," he said, gravely. "What do you make of the case?"

"It is a case of abduction, Chief Watts," said Keene, readily. "Of that I am satisfied."

"What facts have you gathered?"

"First, that Miss Mason is a girl of good character, and not likely to be indulging in any sort of any escapade requiring so extended an absence. The facts are as stated by her uncle. She left home Tuesday evening, and has not been heard from since."

"Did you see her photographs?"

"Yes, chief, I did," bowed the detective. "They at once suggested to me a possibility which I since have verified. The girl is very beautiful, a fact of which she evidently is secretly vain, and which has led her to consent to a proposition, the nature of which she since has been keeping in the dark."

"What is that?"

"She has been posing for a semi-nude statue for John Hale, the sculptor."

"Ah, I see!"

"Of course, her natural desire has been to keep the fact secret. She has been visiting his studio mornings, and indirectly deceiving

her uncle and aunt as to her whereabouts. They would not have consented to such conduct, you know."

"Well, hardly," smiled the chief.

"I have learned, also, that Hale has been making love to the girl," Sheridan Keene continued, knocking the ashes from his cigar. "Just what the true character of this sentiment is I am not yet prepared to say. It is very possible that Hale has formed a genuine affection for the girl, to which she, perhaps, has felt an inclination to respond."

"But I understand that she is engaged to Mr. Wade."

"That is true, Chief Watts," assented Keene. "But the girl's heart must have changed after her engagement. According to statements made by Mrs. Lawton, her aunt, I am led to suspect that this may have been the case. The girl has been very serious of late, frequently remaining in the solitude of her chamber, and evincing in a general way some unusual state of mind. I think possibly that she may have become infatuated with Hale, and in time regretted her engagement to Wade. I don't blame her much in that case, when I compare the two men."

"Go on, Detective Keene."

"Be that as it may, Hale certainly has been making love to the girl. How far this may have gone I am not yet prepared to say. I hope to have all the facts in my possession by to-morrow at this time."

"And the girl?"

"I can't say as to the girl," replied the detective. "On Tuesday night a girl answering Miss Mason's description telephoned to Hale, making an appointment with him on Cambridge Bridge. I know that Hale went there to meet her, but what followed I have not yet learned."

"Have you seen Hale?"

"Not for any purpose as yet, Chief Watts. I now want a warrant for his arrest."

The chief looked a little surprised.

"Can you sustain an allegation?" he asked, gravely.

"I will go a little deeper into the case, Chief Watts, before I answer that question," said Keene, with a curious smile. "The affair has features which are not so superficial as those presented, and from which some rather curious deductions may be drawn. I will run them over, if you say so."

"Do so, by all means," bowed the chief. "Perhaps I can suggest some effective steps in the emergency."

Sheridan Keene drew his chair nearer, and for a half-hour the two clever officers discussed the mysterious affair in all its various lights and shades.

At the end of that time, or a little later, Sheridan Keene left the Headquarters building alone.

And he carried in his pocket a warrant for the arrest of John Hale.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BROKEN STATUE AND AN ARREST.

About half an hour before noon on the following day Sheridan Keene approached the studio of John Hale, in company with an officer in citizen's dress.

"You wait here in the corridor, Brackett," he said, "at the foot of the stairs. I don't anticipate any resistance from this man, but one never can tell what he may run against. I may be with him a quarter-hour or so before I arrest him, however."

"I will wait here, sir, until something comes off."

Despite his observations to the contrary, Sheridan Keene eased the revolver in his hip-pocket as he ascended the stairs. He did not knock at the door, but opened it and entered.

John Hale was seated in a chair near one

of the windows, engaged in studying a design in an art magazine. He was the only occupant of the room, and evidently was at leisure. He looked up when the detective entered, and showed some surprise on seeing the man whom he had found with Jane Bell in his studio on the previous morning; but he at once laid down the publication and arose to meet him.

Keene closed the door and stood motionless on the floor.

"You are Mr. Hale, I believe," he said, quietly.

"Yes, that is my name," bowed the sculptor, with grave composure. "You are the gentleman I saw here yesterday with Miss Bell, I think."

"I did not come here with Miss Bell, sir," responded Keene, steadily regarding him. "I merely chanced to find her here when I entered."

"Is that so?" murmured Hale, with evident surprise. "Yet I understood her to say——"

"What she said is of very little consequence," interposed the detective. "I called here then with an object, and am here now with an object. My name, Mr. Hale, is Sheridan Keene, and I am one of the Boston Inspectors of Police."

Mr. Hale started slightly, and by slow degrees the color faded from his cheeks; but in all other respects he retained his outward composure.

"And pray, Inspector Keene, what is your mission here?" he asked, with an indescribable hardening of tone, and a steadier scrutiny of the detective's face.

"I presume we are alone," said Keene, gravely.

"We are, sir; but what if we were not?"

"I might shrink from saying what it still would become my duty to say," Keene replied. "I have called here, Mr. Hale, to ascertain, if possible, the name of the subject

who posed for the figure occupying the alcove yonder."

The sculptor's bearing instantly underwent a change. He drew himself up with haughty dignity, darkly frowning, and replied with considerable sternness:

"At whose instigation do you come here to ask me that question?"

"Why do you object to giving me the information, Mr. Hale?" replied Keene, instead of responding to the other's inquiry.

"Chiefly because I do not wish to do so."

"You must have more stringent reasons than that of mere personal sentiment, sir."

"I have several reasons," cried Hale, quite angrily. "Models do not care to be advertised as such. You ask for information which it is not customary to disclose. By what right, sir, do you come here with such a question?"

"That of an officer of the law in the performance of his duty," said Keene, with grave austerity.

"Then you may as well take yourself hence, sir, for I shall not answer the question," said the sculptor, shortly.

But Sheridan Keene did not move from his position between him and the door.

"Mr. Hale," he said, sternly; "I hope it may not become necessary to compel you to disclose the information you are withholding. It is intimated that a certain young lady of Beacon street has been regularly visiting your studio, and that she was the subject from which yonder figure was made."

John Hale was steadily growing more pale.

"You are misinformed!" he cried, vehemently. "That is not true!"

"Then you deny the rumor, do you?"

"I do, emphatically!"

"Are you not acquainted with Miss Tillie Mason, of Beacon street?"

"The niece of Dr. Lawton?"

"The same, sir."

"Yes; I have met the young lady."

"Has she not frequently called at your studio during the past six months?"

"She has been here occasionally."

"With what object?"

"Doubtless that which brings many other people here," cried Hale, striving hard to contain his resentment and impatience. "She is interested in art, has purchased some of my work, and is a girl of unquestionable refinement and culture. You are doing her an injustice, and me an outrage, by these persistent inquiries."

"Yet I am doing only what my duty, under the circumstances, requires of me," Keene returned, with unabated decisiveness. "When did you last see Miss Mason?"

"I have not seen her for a week."

"You are sure of that?"

"Do I speak in any uncertain tone?" cried Hale, forcibly, his fine countenance white with rage.

"You had an appointment to meet her last Tuesday night."

The sculptor started as if struck a blow. Surprise that Sheridan Keene should have learned of that appointment was sufficient to have occasioned this perturbation.

"Suppose I did," Hale answered, violently. "What of it?"

"You went to Cambridge bridge to meet her."

"I did not meet her! I have not seen her since——"

"Wait one moment," commanded Keene, with abrupt and startling severity. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Hale, was not Tillie Mason the model for that figure?"

"I deny it!"

"Consider for a moment, and——"

"I will not! I deny it!"

"Have a care!" cried Keene, with eyes never leaving his hearer's hueless face. "It will be an easy matter to bring the girl here

to this studio, and by measurements and comparisons establish the absolute truth."

"Do you say so, you dog of a detective!"

The words broke with indescribable violence from the sculptor's twitching lips. Pale as death, shaken from head to foot with suppressed passion, with eyes in which apprehension and furious resentment battled for supremacy, he turned sharp on his heel and entered his work-room.

He was absent scarce an instant. When he returned, he bore in one of his muscular hands a heavy sledge-hammer, with a head of iron.

Sheridan Keene suspected his purpose the moment he saw it. With a cry he sprang forward and caught the infuriated man by the arm.

"What are you about to do?" he cried, forcibly struggling to stay him and secure the tool.

"Thwart a meddling scoundrel, sir!" thundered Hale, with terrible violence. "Let go my arm!"

"Wait! you will ruin——"

"Let go, or I'll strike you first," roared the sculptor, wrenching free his powerful arm, and hurling Sheridan Keene, despite the latter's utmost efforts, far across the room.

Then the heavy tool rose and fell, swung by a man whose very muscle was developed like that of a trained athlete, and given redoubled strength by his awful passion. The blow was like that of a triphammer. The heavy head of the tool met the breast of the marble figure, shivering the stone into numberless pieces, ruining forever the labor of weeks and months, destroying a piece of art wrought alone for art's sake, and sending the shattered fragments of chaste stone to the floor with a crash that seemed well-nigh to shake the building.

Sheridan Keene uttered an irrepressible groan of dismay, but John Hale flung down

the hammer with a laugh that rang through the room, so intensely bitter, yet so scornfully triumphant, that the blood of the detective fairly chilled.

"Now bring along your girl and make your comparison," Hale cried, with furious contempt. "Thus I will always stand between any good woman and a meddling man!"

Keene drew himself up, meeting the speaker eye to eye, and said with genuine sadness:

"You have done yourself and me an injustice, John Hale. I would have prevented that destruction, could I have done so."

"No doubt of it!" sneered the sculptor.

"But not for the reason you at present infer," said Keene, striding to the door and throwing it open.

As he did so, a clock on a neighboring church struck the hour of noon.

"Come up here, Officer Brackett," the detective instantly called, and the officer sprang up the stairs.

"What's the meaning of this?" Hale now demanded, with an indescribable expression in his glowing eyes. "Another officer here?"

"There's our man, Brackett," Sheridan Keene said sternly, with a commanding wave of the hand, and utterly ignoring Hale's question.

"It means, John Hale, that you are under arrest upon this warrant. I will read it for you, if you desire."

"Arrest—warrant?" gasped Hale. "What charge?"

"That of having abducted Miss Matilda Mason, who has been missing from her home since last Tuesday night."

"Abducted! Tillie Mason abducted!" cried Hale, now white as the linen at his throat. "My God, you don't mean——"

"Take him away, Brackett!"

"Wait, wait!" pleaded Hale, like a man

breaking down under sudden, overwhelming news. "Tell me first——"

"Brackett, remove that man!" Keene interrupted, with voice grown violently stern.

And despite his repeated protests and appeals, John Hale, the last man known to have seen Tillie Mason alive, the man who had gone on that fatal Tuesday night to meet her on Cambridge bridge, was removed from his own studio, and forthwith incarcerated in the city jail.

CHAPTER IX.

KEENE'S MASTER STROKE.

If any one had doubted for a moment that this was a genuine arrest, upon genuine suspicion, then one must have known far more than appeared upon the surface. As a matter of fact, Detective Keene did not even suspect that John Hale had abducted Miss Mason.

There was also a special occasion for Sheridan Keene's getting rid of John Hale in so speedy and decisive a way. He had caught sight of a dark blue skirt and the familiar figure of Jane Bell among the people who had gathered in the corridor, drawn there by the disturbance. Sheridan Keene had timed this arrest to the very hour when he had arranged to meet the sculptor's betrayer, Jane Bell. Possibly it was calculated to save the detective a second journey to Boylston street.

As Hale was forced from the studio, too dismayed and overcome to offer much resistance, Keene caught the girl's eye, and with a significant movement of his head, invited her into the room. She came at once, slipping out like a snake from among the crowd, and the detective quickly closed the door.

"What's the matter?" she asked, with amazement pictured on her painted features. "What have you done to Hale?"

"Arrested him," said Keene, bluntly.

"For what?" exclaimed the girl, in great surprise.

"For the abduction of Tillie Mason."

"You don't mean it?"

"I do mean it. Miss Mason has been missing from her home since last Tuesday night, and Hale met her that evening on Cambridge bridge. I guess I have finally run down the game."

"But what has he done to the girl?"

"What he has not done could probably be told more easily," said Keene, with grim severity. "He has outrageously wronged her, and doubtless found it necessary to put her out of the way. It is a hundred to one that her body now lies at the bottom of the Charles river."

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed Jane Bell, quite pale and shocked. "What a terrible tragedy. Who destroyed the figure yonder?"

"Hale himself."

"But why?"

"He found himself cornered, and probably feared the girl's body would be recovered and brought here for identification, by comparing it with the statue," Keene hurriedly explained. "Oh, it is a dastardly piece of work all through! I will see that Hale swings for it in the end."

"He deserves to! He deserves to!" reiterated Miss Bell, with passionate bitterness. "It is a wonder Tillie-Mason's fate hasn't been my own."

"What do you mean?" asked Keene, with manifest surprise.

"I mean what I say," cried the girl, warming under some bitter recollection. "John Hale is a scoundrel! He made love to me before he ever saw Tillie Mason. He would have ruined me as he doubtless has ruined her. I am glad of it, that he has been brought to justice. I hope in my heart that he will swing for the hideous crime."

There was no doubt that the girl meant

what she said. Her angry eyes and twitching lips, the clenching of her white hands, the passionate trembling of her shapely figure—all indicated her bitter and irrepressible resentment, and that she was a woman of furiously jealous and vengeful spirit.

Sheridan Keene nodded in grim approval of her passionate words, and said, firmly:

"There's no doubt about his guilt. I will take mighty good care that he's brought to the ringbolt."

"I hope so."

"I know so! Here, boy," he added, as the door of the studio opened and Hale's lad entered the room. "Have you a key to this place?"

"Yes, sir, I have," the lad replied, in evident astonishment and dismay.

"Lock the studio, then; and keep out of it till Hale is informed, and gives his own instructions."

"Has Mr. Hale been arrested, sir?" was the sorrowful inquiry.

"Yes, and is likely to remain under arrest," was the curt rejoinder. "Where's his key?"

"Here, sir."

"Get what things that belong to you, then, and come along with me," Keene peremptorily said. "Come, Miss Bell, we will go out in company. I have not forgotten our little compact, and will fix you up outside."

The girl nodded approvingly.

Keene waited until the lad secured his few belongings, and then led the way to the corridor and locked the studio door, putting the key in his own pocket.

"Now, my boy, what's your name?" demanded Keene, delaying his departure for a moment.

"John—John Miller, sir."

"Where do you live?"

"Number — Beech Street, sir."

"With your parents?"

"Yes, sir."

"Run home, then, and stay there," commanded Keene. "I shall want you later. Now, Miss Bell, come with me."

Taking Jane Bell's arm with friendly familiarity, Sheridan Keene descended the stairs with her and crossed Boylston Street, entering the Public Garden.

"Now, Jenny, my dear," he laughed, lightly; "I will make good my promise to you."

"All right, Mr. Keene," she said, with a significant smile and flash of her seductive eyes. "Not a bad day's work, is it?"

"Not bad for either of us, Jenny," laughed Keene, producing a roll of bills. "Here's the eighty, and I hope I shall meet you again."

"Any time you say," whispered the girl, drawing nearer, and slipping into her pocket the notes she had received.

"Then I will meet you right here Sunday evening at eight o'clock," said Keene, softly.

"I will be here."

"I shall be off duty, then."

"You can count on me if you will come."

"Rest easy as to that."

"Do you live at home?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders and laughed significantly.

"My own home," she replied. "I have a room in Gleason's Court."

"Sunday night, then, at eight o'clock."

"Sure thing."

They shook hands and parted, Sheridan Keene returning to Boylston street, and the girl starting off across the garden. She looked back twice; and with the last look Sheridan Keene was lost in the crowd. But the girl was not lost to the detective, nor did he intend she should escape him so easily. The hundred dollars with which he had parted was a sum he did not care to permanently lose.

With skill born of experience, he shadowed the girl till late in the afternoon, when she was evidently returning to her lodgings.

He saw her enter a rather doubtful house in Gleason's Court, and having concealed himself in a doorway, he decided to wait till she should emerge. It was not like girls of her character to remain indoors evenings.

He had waited about half an hour, when he saw a man approach the place, and after some delay effect an entrance. The fellow wore a top-coat, with the collar turned up about his ears.

Still the detective waited.

At the end of nearly an hour the man emerged, and started down town.

Sheridan Keene followed him nearly to the Common, then crossed the street and met him as if by accident.

"Hello, Wade!" he cried. "You are just the man I am looking for."

Wade was very pale, and there were dark rings about his eyes. He started nervously, yet smiled and shook the detective's hand.

"What have you been doing, Keene?" he demanded. "I have not seen you for two days."

"I could not help disappointing you," replied the detective, regretfully. "I have been so frightfully busy on this case."

"What do you make of it?"

"Oh, I have it dead to rights, now; all but recovering the girl's body," said Keene, pointedly. "I am in an awful hurry now, for I must see Chief Watts, or I would tell you all the particulars. I have been busy straightening things out all the afternoon, and shall call at Doctor Lawton's house this evening at eight. If you will be there, I will tell you the whole story."

"Can't you tell me now?" asked Wade, huskily.

"No, no! It's too long! I haven't the time. You can see me at Doctor Lawton's, and hear the whole of it."

"All right, then; I will be there."

Precisely an hour later, Sheridan Keene

rung the bell of Doctor Lawton's Beacon street residence, and was ushered into the library. Both the doctor and his wife were there, and Wade had arrived an hour before. He sat in one corner of the room, without a vestige of color in his insipid face.

The anxiety and impatience of the others could scarce be restrained when Sheridan Keene was shown into the room.

"Oh, Mr. Keene!" cried the rector, starting up. "Have you any news?"

Keene begged him to resume his seat and be calm.

"I have news, sir," he rejoined, gravely, "but you must hear it calmly and with patience."

"I will; I will, sir! Take a chair."

"Good evening, Mr. Wade," nodded Keene, accepting the seat. "You are here before me."

"Yes, I came right up here," said Wade, faintly, with eyes never leaving the detective's grave face.

Sheridan Keene smiled, merely, and turned again to Doctor Lawton.

"I said I had news for you, Doctor Lawton," he said, slowly. "I will tell of what it consists. It appears that your niece, sir, who is a very good and virtuous girl, has been persuaded to yield herself to a design eminently worthy of true and lofty womanhood, and yet which a very natural and commendable sense of modesty has led her to conceal. That she is a good, true and virtuous girl, however, do not for a moment doubt!"

"I don't quite understand you, sir," stammered the aged clergyman, with tearful eyes.

"It appears," continued Keene, with grave earnestness, "that your niece has been posing for a semi-nude figure in marble, for Mr. John Hale, the sculptor, who is a rigidly conscientious and very noble man."

Wade half rose from his chair, and then fell back, ghastly and trembling.

"Is it possible?" groaned Doctor Lawton, faintly. "But my niece! My dearly beloved——"

"Oh, she is all right, sir!" interposed Sheridan Keene, with a wave of his hand toward the open door.

Instantly there appeared on the threshold a girl whose beauty pen could not well describe, with her pale face a picture of remorse and sorrow, yet with eyes in which there shone a light like that of infinite love.

Mrs. Lawton started up with a sharp cry of mingled gratitude and affection. Then Tillie Mason was upon her knees before her, with loving arms clasped around the woman's waist.

Sheridan Keene quickly rose to his feet, and beckoned to the abject figure in the corner.

"Come, Wade!" he said, sternly. "You will have to go along with me!"

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE PLOT WORKED.

There are scenes from which a considerate and well-bred man instantly withdraws, and that of the reunion of Tillie Mason with her loving foster-parents was one of these. Leaving all further disclosures and explanations until a subsequent time, Sheridan Keene immediately removed Ben Wade from the house and took a carriage which the detective had waiting outside.

An hour later Wade was lodged in jail, and at precisely nine o'clock Sheridan Keene entered the office of Chief Inspector Watts, who was waiting his coming.

"Well," he said, inquiringly, as Keene entered.

"The case is ended, chief," replied Keene, quietly. "Miss Mason is safe at home, and Wade and the Bell woman are in custody."

"Very good!" exclaimed the chief, approv-

ingly. "Sit down and give me the particulars."

"They may be briefly told," replied the detective, taking a chair near the chief's desk.

"As I at first suspected, they have had Miss Mason forcibly detained in a house in Gleason Court. I saw Wade go there about five o'clock. He remained there for an hour or more, and I followed him when he left, and made sure of catching him at Lawton's house later in the evening. Then I entered the house in Gleason Court with an officer, and arrested Jane Bell and rescued Miss Mason."

"What did the Bell woman have to say for herself?"

"Oh, she wilted like a wet rag, and confessed the whole business."

"That's well. And Miss Mason?"

"I took her to her own home a little later, and sent her in by a rear door, telling her to enter the room in which I should be received, when she got word from me. She obeyed me to the letter. I wished to prepare the way a little for her, and tone down her offense, for she is really an awfully nice girl."

"Very considerate in you," nodded Chief Watts. "How about Wade?"

"I brought him away at once, chief. The people up there have no further use for him. He cried like a baby in the carriage, and for all I know is crying still."

"What did he have to say?"

"He told the whole story, chief. It corroborates that of Jane Bell."

"What was the story, in brief?"

"It seems that Miss Bell has been posing for John Hale for a year or more, and got it into her head that she ought to have him for a husband. I am satisfied that Hale never gave her any encouragement, for he is not that sort of a man. Nevertheless, she discovered the vanity of her affection, and that Hale was secretly receiving Tillie Mason as a model, and had fallen in love with her."

"Ah, I see."

"Then Miss Bell, who is a very clever, designing and unprincipled girl, laid in wait to trap Hale in some way, and satisfy her jealous hatred of Tillie Mason. She found that Miss Mason was engaged to marry Wade, who is a weak sort of a chap, and evidently aware of it, and she made him her tool by arousing his jealousy and resentment."

"Was the abduction planned by him, or Miss Bell?" inquired Chief Watts.

"Oh, Wade could not plan a dog-house," laughed Keene. "It all was Bell's work. She made Wade believe that, if Tillie Mason could be abducted, she could be forced into a marriage with him, and the matter squared up afterward."

"So they worked the scheme together? How so?"

"It was planned Tuesday morning, chief, and executed that evening. Wade sent word to Tillie Mason, and wanted her to meet him that evening, which she did; and he took her to the house in Gleason Court, where she has since been forcibly detained. That part of the design was dead easy."

"Naturally," bowed Chief Watts.

"About five o'clock Tuesday afternoon, Jane Bell dressed herself up in garments resembling those Tillie Mason wore usually when out of doors at that time, and sent a telephone message to Hale, making an appointment."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"Hale suspected nothing, and of course kept the appointment; but did not meet Miss Mason. He hasn't looked deeper into the affair since, merely because he has been very careful to do nothing that might tend to expose Miss Mason's purpose in visiting his studio. Hence things have looked rather dark against him at times."

"Yes, that is true."

"Jane Bell's hatred was so strong, more-

over," continued Keene, "that she would have done Tillie Mason up for good and all, after Hale was arrested, rather than have had him escape; and Wade found himself helplessly in the power of this she-devil. I didn't quite like to accuse Wade, when I first suspected him, lest I should have trouble in locating Miss Mason; so I went so far, even, as to arrest Hale. In that way, I made it an easy matter to run down the Bell girl to a finish."

"It was a very clever move, Detective Keene. I felt sure it would work well, when you reported the case to me yesterday afternoon," commented Chief Watts.

"Oh, I suspected the Bell girl was at the bottom of it from the very first," Keene continued. "Her artful manner, the readiness with which she betrayed that Miss Mason was the model, her getting rid of Johnny Miller to see me alone in the studio that morning, and her evident jealousy of the girl who had posed as the model, all indicated to me that Jane Bell was a crooked stick."

"I should say so."

"The greatest mistake she made was when she overshot the mark in trying to impress me to suspect Hale," laughed Sheridan Keene. "She didn't imagine that I was reading her at her true face value."

"Not an easy matter to read a face so painted as hers," laughed Chief Watts.

"Well, her hatred was sufficient to show through the paint. Furthermore, the persistent interest Wade had in all my doings suggested that there must be some collusion between him and Jane Bell, so I laid myself out to learn what it was. As a matter of fact, chief, I had the case pretty nearly to rights from the moment I caused Wade to faint in Vercelli's restaurant."

"So you told me," smiled the chief.

"It was very loyal in Hale to deny Miss Mason's favor conferred on him," observed Keene, musingly. "He must be a very fine

fellow to stand so true to the girl, and he even ruined the work of months in order to shield her from exposure. I really hope she is in love with him, as I already am sure he is in love with her."

"I guess there's no doubt about that," laughed Chief Watts.

"Why so, chief?" Keene asked, eagerly.

"For I have detained Hale, and have told him the whole story," replied the chief. "They are very much in love, and have been for some time. I guess Wade's chances for Miss Mason were growing very slim weeks ago."

"And Hale?"

"I have him in the adjoining room," said Chief Watts, laughing genially. "I thought you might like to meet him under pleasanter circumstances."

"Indeed, I would!" cried Keene, springing up.

"Garratt!" called the chief. "Show Mr. Hale in this way!"

"Yes, sir."

John Hale entered the room with a glad smile on his face, and with hand extended.

"Sheridan Keene," he cried, warmly; "I am glad to meet you again!"

"And I you, Mr. Hale," laughed Keene, thrilling with pleasure. "But I am awfully sorry that I permitted you to ruin that magnificent piece of statuary."

Hale gave vent to a glad, ringing laugh.

"But you did me an everlasting service, at the same time, Detective Keene," he cried, with joyous fervor. "You gave me a clear title to something ten thousand times more beautiful and desirable!"

"What was that?" demanded Keene, eagerly.

John Hale drew up his splendid figure and threw back his head.

"To the live reality, God willing!" he cried, with joyous fervency.

THE END.

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